

## **REPORT OF 9<sup>TH</sup> NORTHERN REGION LEARNING ALLIANCE PLATFORM MEETING**

### **(UDS Navrongo WASH Program)**

The ninth edition of the NRLAP meeting took place at the conference hall of the Community Water and Sanitation Agency in tamale on 6<sup>th</sup> May, 2015. The meeting was organized at the instance of the University for Development Studies which in conjunction with the Desert Research Institute, Nevada, USA and World Vision Ghana is putting together a number of programs designed for the water, sanitation and hygiene sector.

The meeting sought to draw on the experience of the sector players in terms of what exist and what is needed in the WASH sector to bridge the gap between academia and practice which will ultimately go a long way to positively influence the design and contents of the proposed programs.

The chairperson for the occasion in the person of Ms Patricia Gyamfi, Principal Information Technology Specialist at CWSA underscored the vital role the NRLAP is playing in the rural WASH sub sector. She urged all members to bring out the best in them as the issue tabled for discussion is a novelty and it behooves on all partners to contribute to its success.

The UDS Navrongo WASH representative, Mr. Samuel Abanyie noted that a proposal to offer training and education in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene related issues had been considered and had consequently triggered further research by UDS and Desert Research Institute. He therefore deemed it appropriate to solicit and discuss among the sector players the key challenges, directions and collectively generate and fine-tune the WASH programs being considered.

He also emphasized the need for an input from end-users in establishing and designing the WASH program and therefore was confident that the meeting would elicit and drive participants to contribute to the discussions/issues regarding sector challenges and way forward. He was therefore encouraged that the major players including CWSA, EHSU, and NGOs among others were in attendance.

The coordinator stated that research and training was the key part in the whole concept and that the Centre had resolved to collaborate with all relevant stakeholders for the establishment of a WASH Centre. He asserted that the centre wanted to do something different from the usual approach, adding that the focus would take the bottom-up or end-user approach.

### **PRESENTATIONS**

Community Water and Sanitation Agency and the Environmental health directorate made presentations on challenges facing the rural water and sanitation sub sectors respectively. This was to bring the understanding of the UDS team to an appreciable level in terms of the real issues of concern.

Difficult hydro geological conditions, funding gaps, limited capacity at the district assembly level, poor coordination and collaborations by sector partners, low coverage were just but few of the issues identified by CWSA as posing a serious threat to the goal of achieving universal access to water. It was observed that, the concept of a WASH centre couldn't have come at a better time looking at the numerous challenges facing the rural water sector.

The Environmental Health and Sanitation directorate gave an update of the sanitation situation in the region. It was clear that, open defecation still remains a major problem as 72% of the population was engaged in the practice. The directorate noted lack of coordination and collaboration by sector partners, issues of legislation and policy, social norms and traditions, inadequate funds, lack of research

opportunities as some the bottlenecks in the sanitation sector. The idea of a WASH centre was hence welcoming and refreshing as most of these challenges could be addressed by innovative research by students. It was worth noting that, water and sanitation remains a powerful force behind every nation's development as it affects the quality of life and productivity of the population.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

Participants in a breakout session had a critical look at the programs on offer (Bsc. WASH and short courses) with the view of fine tuning them. This session was then followed by a general discussion by the entire house on each of the subjects listed in the program.

Mr. John Aduakye, Chief Hydrogeologist of CWSA-NR, stated that a program with the requisite content to build the capacity of sector players and any other individual should be the aim of UDS. It was observed that most sector players of today had had to acquire the skills and knowledge of operating in the rural WASH sector on the job. This he stated should not be allowed to happen and challenged UDS to think through the courses very well so as to become a centre of excellence in the West African sub region.

Participants also shared their experiences with most of the courses and proffered suggestions. Some of the courses were deemed not so relevant and the team made inputs as to how it could be redesigned, there were also proposals from members for some of the courses to be merged as they had similar bearing.

The courses and the contents therein could not be stated in this report as it is an intellectual property of the university and its affiliates and the platform has not had any express authority to publish the contents.

## **CLOSING**

The meeting ended with participants praying the university to make this dream a reality to help carry out research in the WASH sector.

The vice dean of UDS-Navrongo was particularly enthused by the excitement with which partners received the programs and promised that the university shall take onboard all the issues raised in the determination of the final product.